

# Grazing Improvement Program (GIP) Protects The Environment And Improves Utah's Rural Economy

For decades no one person has been in a position to speak for, or represent, the interests of Utah's livestock industry during the debate over rangeland issues. Under a UDAF proposal, the position of "rangeland specialist" would be created to carry out this important responsibility.

Utah cattle and sheep ranchers depend on the state's 11 million acres of private and public lands as a grazing resource. Utah's livestock industry contributes more than \$600 million to Utah's economy. The addition of a rangeland specialist is one of several features of the newly introduced Grazing Improvement Program (GIP).

*The following are comments by Commissioner of Agriculture and Food, Leonard Blackham, regarding his proposal to create the GIP Program..*

Utah's Livestock Industry is the largest single sector of Utah's Agricultural economy. We have the opportunity to help expand that sector and improve our rural economy. Improving rangeland also protects the environment in many ways, including inhibiting the start and spread of costly range fires.

I believe the UDAF and ranchers need to play a more significant role in solutions. The challenge is that grazing lands are negatively impacted by invasive species such as weeds, insects, pinion-juniper, cheat grass, and other problem grasses.

The involvement of the livestock industry in the Public Land Policy debate, at times, is limited by a variety of factors such as: lack of time by individual ranchers; organized grazing committees lack authority and staff support; and poor access to support from the State of Utah.

At this time the UDAF does not have the program, expertise or staff to offer assistance to ranchers. As a result, rural community economies are being hurt.

One of the solution is to create the Grazing Improvement Program (GIP). It would empower and reorganizing the existing Grazing Committees such as the Regional Taylor Grazing Boards and the Utah Grazing Network. It will give them authority to advise the State over all grazing issues as well as improve range conditions and range rehabilitation. Our range specialist would be able to offer a voice during the debate over public lands policy Issues.

## The GIP Program

The GIP program will be lead by a range specialist and assisted by a policy analysts and a rangeland scientist. The program will provide staff support for the grazing committees and offer sound information regarding grazing issues. Information will flow both ways between the Department of Agriculture and Food and the livestock industry.

The Program has three major components:

- Expand the authority and ability of regional and state grazing boards to impact federal management plans and current rangeland issues. Input from the boards, USU extension and research by the staff will formulate suggestions to the Governor's Office for official state positions on grazing issues for federal and state agencies.

- Through a coordinated effort, GIP will expand the number of projects that rehabilitate our natural resources, increase productivity and protect the landscape for all Utahns. The benefits include increased water quality and quantity, added wildlife and livestock capacity, and better weed control; all of which will strengthen our rural economy.

- A revision of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act). Work for a process that continues to make land management discussions that are "open" but are more reasonable, affordable and effective in addressing the impacts of invasive species and productive capacity of rangeland and watersheds. GIP must find ways to stop wasting resources on frivolous legal maneuvering. It must bring opponents into the discussion from the beginning. We want federal agencies that are "can do" rather than "can't do" agencies of today. Proper management is more than no action. The lengthy delays that often occur only allow the invasive species to destroy our landscapes.

The past 30 years of fighting over land use issues is now starting to show negative results such as dead forests, severe wildfires, diminished watersheds, and low renewable capacity of the living resources of the land.

The Grazing Improvement Program will work to reverse such negative trends by offering a cooperative effort that will include all parties who have a "can do" interest in improving Utah's grazing resources.



*Pictured above are two methods of improving rangeland. The UDAF is proposing to add a rangeland specialist as a resource to help strengthen the livestock industry and rural Utah's economy.*